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Horse car of the Bloomfield line at Broad and William streets after stopping at Broad street station of Jersey Central's Newark and New York Railroad Branch (behind trees at right above which rises the spire of Old First Church). Old City Hall is at left and the towers of Prudential Insurance building in center background.

When Newark Was Younger

Rapid Transit System Paced City's Growth; Today's Buses Are Palaces On Wheels Compared to Horse Cars

By Miriam Studley

Principal New Jersey History Librarian, Newark Public Library

THE story of transportation in Newark a century ago has a strangely contemporary flavor, for the people who traveled from West Orange to Newark on the Morris and Essex Railroad, opened in 1835, were highly dissatisfied with the service and the rates. So much so, that a horse-drawn omnibus line was established from St. Mark's Church on the West Orange boundary to the New Jersey Railroad bridge at Center street.

New York City early discovered that a horse-car railway, with metal wheels running on metal tracks imbedded in the pavement, was a much safer and more orderly system of transportation than the racing omnibuses. Newarkers, whose businesses took them to lower Broadway and the Bowery in the 1840s, had a chance to observe the new line, and the Orange and Newark Horse Car Railroad Co. was chartered in 1859 to take the place of the omnibus from Orange. Due to the War of the Rebellion and to opposition along Market street, the cars did not run until 1862, but from that time on the development of horse car lines was rapid.

The first horse cars bore little resemblance to the Public Service subway cars of today. They were tiny affairs with plush covered seats running along the sides, and straw covering the floor in Winter to warm the feet of the passengers. At first unheated, they later had tiny stoves that failed to do more than remove a little of the chill. The drivers, standing with the reins in one hand, and the brake in the other, was totally exposed to the weather, for only a low metal dash board separated him from the horse. Later windows were installed above the dash boards, but the platforms were still not inclosed. A conductor stood on the rear platform to collect fares, although there was one type of car, called the "bob tail" that had but one platform, the driver collecting the fares at great inconvenience to the passengers. Smoky oil lamps were used for cars that ran at night.

THE cars weighed about a ton apiece, and the passengers usually another ton, so that extra horses had to be added as town where there were many curves, as on the Bloomfield line, or where, as on Orange street and South Orange avenue the hills were steep. As many as six horses sometimes had to be used for crowded runs. Not until 1869, when the matter was brought to a vote were horse cars run on Sundays.

The inconveniences of the horse cars were apparent from the first. They were expensive to operate for a horse could work only four to six hours a day. There were many experiments throughout the United States in the use of mechanical power. Cable cars, so long used in San Francisco, were tried for a short time in Newark and abandoned. At first electricity could be transmitted only a short distance through wires, but as the new motive power was perfected, electric car lines rapidly replaced the horse railways.

The first electric cars in New Jersey were run by a cross-town line in Orange for a few months in 1887. October 4, 1890, was a gala day in Newark when crowds gathered to witness the first trip of the earliest successful electric railway. This was

Trolley and motorman of line which operated on Central avenue around 1902. Note windows on platform and stovepipe on roof. RIGHT: Twentieth Century was still young when this trolley bus, the original "all service vehicle," was tested by transitmen in front of old Empire Theater on Washington Street.

Time: Four minutes to nine—and trolleys pile up on Market street in front of The Newark Evening News Building. View is west, toward the Four Corners.

on the Springfield avenue line of the Newark Passenger Railway which was the first continuous large scale operation in the state. Three weeks after the opening of the Springfield Avenue Line the Rapid Transit Co. began operating along Central avenue to Broad street. By 1893 all lines were electrified; the last horse car was seen on Mulberry street on March 16, 1893. This was years before they disappeared in New York City, where one line was kept open, to hold a franchise, until July 26, 1917.

The speed and cleanliness of the new electric trolleys made them a favorite conveyance for pleasure trips as well as for business. Open cars, with seats running crosswise, and steps lengthwise on the sides, were brought out early in the Spring, and in the long Summer evenings whole families went riding. Picnics on vacations and on week-ends had as objectives Roseville Park, Electric Park in Vailsburg, Eagle Rock or Verona Lake. The crowds some 35 years later were terrific and men going to the ball parks or to the races at Waverly clung to the steps, to the handrails, even to the roofs and dash boards, and "nobody seemed to care if they fell off or not."

ALREADY mergers of street railway companies had begun to take place, and, by the time the Public Service Corporation of New Jersey was incorporated in 1903, Newark had 12 street railways, representing the consolidation of over 100 transportation firms, of which two were turnpike companies. At that time Public Service leased many of the street railways.

The "jitney bus" originating at the time of World War I was the ancestor of our modern bus transportation. Many private bus companies sprang up in the 20s. When Newark celebrated its Charter Centennial in 1936, the Public Service Corporation was operating 17 trolley car lines and four bus companies. The removal of the car lines from the streets to the City Subway, the development of the Public Service Terminal, and the All Service Buses are a part of our personal experience. When Newark celebrates its 300th anniversary in 1966, we shall doubtless be relating these events as ancient history. Shall we be traveling by atom-powered helicopter bus then?

In 1900 Clifton avenue trolleys crossed Lackawanna tracks at the above grade. The tragic deaths of nine Barringer High School pupils at this spot in February, 1903, brought to a head agitation for elimination of grade crossings.

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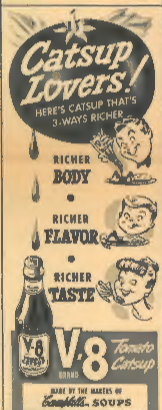

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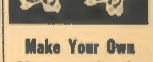

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